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Evaluating social pedagogy in the UK: Methodological issues

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Steve Kirkwood (The University of Edinburgh)

Autumn Roesch-Marsh (The University of Edinburgh)

Sheila Cooper (Independent Researcher)

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Corresponding author contact details:

Dr Steve Kirkwood

Lecturer in Social Work

The University of Edinburgh

Chrystal Macmillan Building

15A George Square

Edinburgh EH8 9LD

E-mail: s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk

Office phone: +44 (0)131 650 6646

Mobile phone: +44 (0)791 096 3355

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Social pedagogy, evaluation, residential childcare, learning disabilities

Abstract

In recent years, various social services in the UK have piloted using social pedagogy – a broadly education-based approach to bringing about social change originating in mainland Europe – as a way of improving practice, particularly in residential childcare. Pilot evaluations of initiatives to introduce social pedagogy to children's services have produced generally positive results, although the evidence remains modest and the studies are affected by a range of methodological limitations. In this article, we critically review existing evaluations, supplemented by insights from our experience as independent evaluators for a social pedagogy pilot for services supporting people with learning disabilities, to present an account of the challenges and opportunities of evaluating social pedagogy in the UK. We argue that some of the main challenges relate to: defining social pedagogy; measuring the baseline prior to implementing social pedagogy training; understanding individual and organisational change; measuring outcomes; and applying an appropriate approach for the evaluation. We conclude with recommendations for those intending to evaluate social pedagogy, and similar initiatives, in the future.

Introduction

Social pedagogy has a long history in mainland Europe, but is less well known in the UK (Lorenz, 2008). In the last few years, various social services in the UK have piloted using social pedagogy as a way of improving practice, particularly in residential childcare. Cameron (2016) explained that the growth of social pedagogy in relation to residential childcare relates to a policy focus on improving quality of life matched with a relative lack of well-grounded theoretical approaches and qualifications for this work in the UK. Residential care or group care for children looked after by the state is most often used for older children and young people in the UK where kinship care or foster care is either unsuitable or unavailable; there has also been a decline in the use of residential care in the UK since the 1970s due to a preference for family based care and negative perceptions about the quality of residential care (Berridge et al., 2011). More recently, in Scotland, social pedagogy training has been piloted with people with learning disabilities, based on the experience within Camphill Communities and supported by the Scottish Government (2013) strategy on improving quality of life for people with learning disabilities. In reviewing ten of these pilots

in residential childcare, Cameron (2016) found the results were generally positive, although not always conclusive, and often the implementation of social pedagogy was challenging. We present a critical review of existing evaluations of social pedagogy in the UK, supplemented by insights from our experience as independent evaluators of a social pedagogy pilot, outlining the challenges and opportunities of evaluating social pedagogy. We argue that the main challenges relate to: defining social pedagogy; measuring the baseline prior to implementing social pedagogy; understanding individual and organisational change; measuring outcomes; and applying an appropriate approach for the evaluation. We conclude with recommendations for those intending to evaluate social pedagogy, and similar initiatives, in the future.

Our critical review of existing evaluations is based on published reports (Berridge et al., 2011; Cameron et al., 2011; Smith and Skinner, 2013; Vrouwenfelder et al., 2012) and Cameron's (2016) recent review of the findings of social pedagogy evaluations, including unpublished literature. It is informed by a range of other literature on social pedagogy and evaluation research methods.

We supplement this review with insights from our own experience as independent evaluators of a social pedagogy pilot for people with learning disabilities based at Camphill Communities in Scotland.¹ The full methodology and findings from our evaluation are available in the evaluation report (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015). Our evaluation was based on an action research approach, which we discuss in the section on different approaches to evaluation below, and involved mixed-methods, including observation, qualitative focus groups and interviews, surveys, analysis of outcome data collected by staff, organisational documents and staff members' reflective diaries.

The challenges of evaluating social pedagogy

Defining social pedagogy

One of the key challenges for evaluating social pedagogy is in defining what 'it' is. Härmäläinen (2015) explained that social pedagogy is an ambiguous concept, difficult to define, with varying theoretical conceptions and country-specific ways in which it is applied.

¹ The Camphill movement originated in the 1940s in Scotland. It involves intentional communities where people live and work together, based on principles of mutuality, respect and learning (see Jackson, 2011).

He stated: 'There is no unanimity on the nature of social pedagogy, no universal definition, no common theory and no uniform establishment for practice procedures.' (Hämäläinen, 2015: 1028). Social pedagogy is often defined as 'education in its broadest sense' (Petrie, 2011; Smith and Whyte, 2008) and, in relation to children, having a concern for their 'upbringing' (Smith, 2012, 2013). People who practise social pedagogy take an educational approach (Cameron and Moss, 2011). Hämäläinen (2015) explained that social pedagogy operates within, and on the borders between, social care and civic education. Smith and Whyte (2008) suggest that there is no single 'method' of social pedagogy, but at the core of social pedagogical practice is concern for the individual in their societal context and an emphasis on the transformative potential of education. The value base underpinning social pedagogy shares much in common with strengths based approaches and social work. Empowerment of individuals is a central theme, with the aim of nurturing individual and collective potential. Essentially, social pedagogy is holistic and humanistic, promoting social functioning and participation in society.

Several commentators have explained that social pedagogy cannot be defined simply by what people 'do'. Petrie (2011: 8) stated that 'social pedagogy is based on values: it is an ethical practice, not a technique' and Cameron (2013) raised her concerns that social pedagogy was sometimes seen as a range of 'techniques' in the UK, rather than being treated as a profession. Eichsteller and Holthoff (2012: 34) explain that the German concept of '*Haltung*' is important for understanding social pedagogy; they translate this as 'ethos, mindset, or attitude'. They argue that social pedagogy is about 'being', that it is 'a skin rather than a jacket' (34), that it is an art form rather than a skill, that it is 'not so much about what is done, but more about how something is done' (33), and that it 'expresses an emotional connectedness to other people and profound respect for their human dignity' (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2011:54, cited in Cameron et al., 2011: 14). Smith and Whyte (2008) describe this mindset as involving an ethical stance in relation to the 'other'. Although this provides some sense of the general meaning of social pedagogy, ambiguity regarding its exact definition makes it challenging to operationalise within an evaluation or know when it is being practised appropriately.

If social pedagogy is understood as a 'mindset' or taking on certain values, then an evaluation could focus on ascertaining the values and mindset of practitioners before and after training, to determine whether they have taken on an appropriate mindset – specifically in relation to their ethical stance and respect for human dignity – and gauge the extent of change. People may change their values at a slower pace than they might change their

practices, so these would need to be evaluated over a relatively long period of time (Sullivan and Johns, 2002). By way of comparison, Smith and Spitzmueller (2016) applied ethnography to examine the applied practices of milieu therapy, demonstrating that the ethos or ‘mindset’ of milieu therapy informed the way staff engaged with service users as well as allowing them to ‘see’ certain everyday practices as inherently therapeutic.

Although researchers and theorists often define social pedagogy in terms of ‘mindset’, some also refer to particular concepts that are used in practice, such as the common third and the 3Ps (e.g., Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015; Smith and Skinner, 2013; Vrouwenfelder et al., 2012). The ‘common third’ refers to those activities that are jointly shared between staff and service users, where the roles of expert and learner are reversed or both parties are learners, thereby involving greater equality in the interactions (Smith, 2012). The ‘three Ps’ refers to the private, personal and professional selves of the social pedagogue (Smith, 2012). This concept may help pedagogues to consider what aspects of themselves to share with others. The professional self involves theories and professional practices regarding others’ behaviours that are routinely used in practice, and the personal self involves someone’s personality and creative skills, which may also be brought into practice, whereas the private realm relates to those aspects that are only shared with close friends and family and are not appropriate or helpful to bring into practice (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012). Social pedagogues are expected to use their ‘head, heart and hands’, meaning the ‘intellectual, emotional and practical’ aspects of their selves (Smith, 2012: 50), so they draw on theoretical understandings of behaviour in their work, while also relating authentically to people, and being involved in practical arts, sporting, cultural or other activities. Practitioners are also expected to have a ‘lifeworld orientation’ (Lorenz, 2008), such that they work to understand people’s experiences within their own world view, and their engagement takes place within the ‘lifespace’ (i.e., everyday activities within their whole life, rather than being limited to the classroom; Smith, 2012).

Furthermore, those who deliver social pedagogy training may include specific concepts and practices in their training, including the notions of ‘learning zones’, the ‘diamond model’ and non-violent communication (ThemPra, 2015). The learning zone model suggests there are three zones: the comfort zone (where we feel safe and avoid risks), the panic zone (where we experience high levels of anxiety) and the learning zone (where we have new experiences, confront the unfamiliar, and are most able to learn; ThemPra, 2015). The diamond model is based on the assumption that everyone has value and the potential to ‘shine’. The model includes different dimensions of social pedagogical practice, specifically

the emphasis on promoting well-being and happiness, holistic learning, positive experiences, the importance of positive relationships and the goal of empowerment (ThemPra, 2015). Non-violent communication is based on the work of Rosenberg (2003), which involves empathetic and non-judgemental ways of relating to others, and recognising and clearly communicating needs and feelings. This suggests that social pedagogy is not only a mindset but also involves drawing on particular concepts in practice. Indeed, Hämäläinen (2015) suggests that social pedagogy in the UK has been particularly understood as relating to communication skills in educational settings. As such, evaluators should measure the extent to which practitioners apply these theories and concepts within practice, while being aware of Smith's (2013) comments that people's dispositions are of greater importance than their use of certain 'techniques'.

When social pedagogy is introduced into a new setting, the service will already have a particular way of working that includes certain values and practices, albeit these may be implicit rather than explicit and they are likely to vary across individuals and across different settings within an organisation. These settings may include a strength based perspective and reflective practice – both of which are considered important aspects of social pedagogy (Cameron, 2011) – without necessarily being based on social pedagogy. Indeed, strength based approaches and reflective practice are encouraged within social work and social care (Oliver and Charles, 2015; Ruch, 2005; Saleebey, 1996). So if social pedagogy is introduced to a setting where strengths based perspectives and reflection are not happening, this could be seen as simply a case of poor practice, instances where training on, and the implementation of, these practices would make an improvement, regardless of whether they were 'social pedagogy' or not.

This begs the question of whether social work in the UK is very different from social pedagogy. Perhaps 'good' social work might look a lot like social pedagogy? We could imagine social workers who appreciated the inherent good of every person, who engaged in a 'personal' manner, who applied theory in their practice, who used good communication skills, and who were reflective. Such people might be very effective at their jobs, and have many similarities in their practice compared with social pedagogues, while still clearly being social workers rather than social pedagogues.

It seems to us that the best way of conceiving of social pedagogy is as 'praxis'; the bringing together of theory and practice (Freire, 1970; Rolfe, 1993). Perhaps there is a third aspect: the values. Social pedagogy might best be defined as holding the relevant values, using the relevant practices, and having an approach underpinned by the relevant theories.

Several evaluations of social pedagogy, including ours, found that staff said they gained a language for describing practices they already used, and said they learned about theory to underpin their practices, without their practices changing (Cameron, 2016; Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015; Vrouwenfelder et al., 2012). If evaluators are more specific in defining these different dimensions of social pedagogy – the values, theory and practices – this may help to get a better sense of the extent to which the training has changed these aspects, and how far away from or close to a social pedagogical ‘ideal’ the practitioners were at the start and end of the pilot.

Measuring the baseline regarding practice

In order to identify any changes that have occurred during the pilot, it is important to establish a baseline prior to any changes being implemented. This would also allow evaluators to get a sense of how compatible the organisation is with social pedagogy and how far along it is with its practice. This is essential for measuring the change that occurs during the initiative, and also provides helpful information about the context, which may be particularly useful when comparing social pedagogy initiatives that have taken place in different contexts. In this regard, a social pedagogy trainer told us that certain contexts may provide more ‘fertile ground’ (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015: 34) for social pedagogy to ‘grow’. If the context is too dissimilar from social pedagogy, then initiatives may fail, not because the practice in itself is ineffective, but because the people involved were unable to overcome the barriers to change, such as people being unwilling or unable to engage with social pedagogy, or organisational cultures that made it difficult to innovate or otherwise conflicted with social pedagogy. This issue is not necessarily specific to social pedagogy, but may come about wherever people are encouraged to change their ways of working (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012; Maguire, 2004).

Previous evaluations have found that certain aspects of the context may make it more difficult for practitioners to implement and practise social pedagogy. These include negative attitudes towards social pedagogy; requiring social pedagogues to practise in line with existing policies and procedures; organisational problems, such as a lack of residents or funding; and risk averse policies and procedures (Berridge et al., 2011; Smith and Skinner, 2013). Conversely, researchers have also found that practitioners and managers may report that social pedagogy initiatives have had little effect because they claimed to already be practising in ways that resembled social pedagogy (Berridge et al., 2011; Roesch-Marsh et

al., 2015)(Berridge et al., 2011; Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015). By having a good understanding of the baseline, evaluators will be better able to measure the change that has occurred, and this should provide a better understanding regarding any changes or lack of change. Moreover, it may help when comparing across different contexts and evaluations, so that researchers and practitioners can get an idea of where and when social pedagogy initiatives might be most effective.

Individual practice vs. organisational culture

There have been different approaches to social pedagogy initiatives in the UK. One approach is to deliver training in social pedagogy to a number of practitioners within an organisation, who are then tasked with spreading this practice more widely (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015), whereas another approach is to bring in social pedagogues from mainland Europe with the intention of encouraging their colleagues to take on a social pedagogical approach (Berridge et al., 2011). Whatever the approach, the intention was to create change at the level of the organisation. So should the evaluation focus on individual or organisational change?

Social pedagogy is often described as being about ‘being’ (Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2012), which implies that people are the focus, therefore it would seem appropriate to focus on the way that individuals change their values, knowledge and practice. However, staff members do change (Berridge et al., 2011), therefore evaluators should also establish the extent to which the ‘organisation’ is in line with social pedagogy and how this changes over time. Indeed Eichsteller and Holthoff (2012) argue that the successful implementation of social pedagogy requires change across the entire organisation, which they suggest can take years. Examining organisational change could be done through interviews with senior management, and the analysis of organisation documents (e.g., mission statements, policies, procedures and meeting minutes), which Cameron, Petrie and Wigfall (2011: 46) suggest are important for social pedagogy, identifying the extent to which the organisation appears to encourage or require values, knowledge or practice relating to social pedagogy.

In the pilots, individuals were not only expected to practise in ways consistent with social pedagogy, but were also expected to influence practice more widely in their organisation, a much more challenging goal. Such change is most likely to succeed if key individuals (particularly senior management) are committed to the change, provide leadership, and guide staff through the process (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2014). Where social pedagogues were placed in residential units and expected to create change, several found it

very difficult to encourage their colleagues to work in social pedagogical ways, and some gave up and left the organisation (Berridge et al., 2011). In our evaluation, because we took an action research approach, it was important to support the learning experiences of the staff and the implementation of their organisational changes, mostly through engaging in dialogue with them, helping them to reflect on their situation, present them with the data we had collected and provide an ‘outsider perspective’ on the situation.

The selective targeting of practitioners for training raises questions about the effectiveness of such training when rolled out to the wider workforce. For instance, practitioners told evaluators Vrouwenfelder, Milligan and Merrell (2012) that staff were ‘cherry picked’ to attend the training. As evaluators often focused on the effects of the training (Cameron et al., 2011; Smith and Skinner, 2013), this raises questions about the potential effects when the training is rolled out to other staff. If other staff are less open to social pedagogy, they may be less likely to take it on or apply it in their practice, which means it may be less effective (see Maguire, 2004). Relatedly, the application of the training in itself may affect the behaviour of staff – so called ‘Hawthorne effects’ (Carpenter, 2011; Greenberg and Morris, 2005) – which means the apparent benefits may not hold over time or when rolled out more generally. Although, in saying this, we heard from practitioners in the pilot we evaluated that even those who were relatively resistant to the training at first became convinced over time (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015).

Measuring outcomes for service users

Several of the evaluations of social pedagogy so far have focused on the process of implementing social pedagogy and / or the effects of social pedagogy training on practitioners (e.g., Cameron et al., 2011; Smith & Skinner, 2013; Vrouwenfelder et al., 2012). However, if the use of social pedagogy is to be worthwhile, then it should be demonstrated that it has a positive impact for service users (Axford et al., 2005). Therefore, evaluators should seek to measure relevant aspects of service users’ quality of life before, during and after the pilot period to see what impact social pedagogy made in terms of the benefits for service users. In doing so, the measures ought to be both valid and manageable.

In terms of the validity of the measures, they should measure aspects of people’s lives that are relevant for them and make sense in the context of the service (e.g., be related to the aims and objectives of the service; Miller, 2011). These outcomes could be positive – in the sense that the service intends to increase them, such as self-esteem – or they could be

negative – in the sense that the service intends to reduce their occurrence, such as violent behaviour. For instance, Berridge et al. (2011) measured positive outcomes such as school attendance, educational progress, effort and attainment, engagement in constructive activities, quality of contact with family, well-being, and negative outcomes such as ‘behavioural problems’, aggression, violence, involvement in crime, ‘risky behaviour’, going missing, drug/alcohol abuse, self-harm and school exclusion. Such a range of measures is useful for establishing the impact that social pedagogy might have. However, are all of these reasonable outcomes for social pedagogy? For instance, should social pedagogy be expected to improve quality of contact with families or reduce drug misuse? If so, how? Moreover, certain measures – e.g., quality of family contact, school exclusion and criminal justice responses – are related to systems beyond the service user or the service, and therefore these measures may have little or no relation to changes in staff practices. As argued by Preskill and Torres (1999), the problem is not simply that organisations do not have enough data – often they have access to large amounts of data – but rather the nature or availability of the data does not match the needs of the organisation in terms of evaluating their work. Particularly in these cases, the evaluators should be clear about the potential connections between social pedagogy and the expected outcomes.

In our evaluation, staff were expected to use the ‘Outcomes that Matter’ system (Fulcher and Garfat, 2013) to measure outcomes with the people they supported. Although several staff members did try to use the system in the early stages of the pilot, they found that completing the forms was very time consuming and they also told us that, in their view, the measure was not very suitable for the people they were supporting. In this regard, Cook and Miller (2012) suggest that measuring personal outcomes should involve measuring those things most important to the people involved and Miller (2011) highlights that outcome systems should not be too demanding on staff. The staff developed their own outcomes measurement tool which they perceived as better suited to the nature of the service, and which mostly involved qualitative comments on the social pedagogical approaches used and outcomes (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015). As highlighted by Miller (2011), ‘personal outcomes’ can be very specific to individuals, whereas the organisation or service will have its own outcomes that are seen as relevant across all service users. Using a system that places emphasis on outcomes that are particular to the individual service users makes it more difficult to establish the outcomes across groups of service users or at the level of the service. In particular, it does not make it easy to establish the baseline of needs or to measure change across time and it is difficult to turn the qualitative data into statistical measures that would

give a sense of the ‘amount’ of change achieved or the number of service users who had benefited. So while the tool seemed to be an improvement, it was not well suited for making comparisons between the effects of using social pedagogy compared with the existing practice or other practices. Furthermore, because the tool specifically focuses on the use of social pedagogy, this means it would not make sense to use it in cases where social pedagogy is not being used, and indeed it excludes approaches that are not considered part of social pedagogy.

In this regard it is worth noting that measuring quality of life outcomes for people with learning disabilities is complex (Townsend-White et al., 2012). Defining ‘success’ may be particularly challenging when supporting people with long-term severe learning disabilities. For future evaluations of social pedagogy as used to support people with learning disabilities, it would be worth exploring the use of systematic measures that are designed and validated for use with this population, such as the Caregiver’s Concerns-Quality of Life Scale (Unwin and Deb, 2014).

Service users’ views on social pedagogy are obviously an important source of information regarding the effectiveness of this approach. Asking young people to express their views on a service is a sensitive and skilled thing for researchers to do (Cree et al., 2002). In our evaluation, this was even more challenging as many of the service users had severe learning disabilities and often were unable to speak. As highlighted by Gilbert (2004), it is important to treat this challenge as relating to an inadequacy of the research methods commonly used, rather than treating this as a deficit among the service users. He suggests that this work involves time and experience, as well as potentially using creative methods to elicit the views of service users with learning disabilities. In our case, one of our team used an arts based activity – collage - to engage with the service users and get a sense of their views (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015). In terms of other evaluations, Berridge et al. (2011) found it difficult to identify the impact of the pilot based on service users’ feedback. Overall, then, service users’ views make up a potentially important part of the picture, but they require skill to elicit and may not be definitive.

Different approaches to evaluation

When evaluating social initiatives, evaluators generally want to establish the impact that the initiative has had, particularly in terms of benefits for service users. To do this, evaluators need to gain an understanding of the *counterfactual* – that is, what would have happened if

not for the initiative (Greenberg and Morris, 2005)? There are different ways evaluators can do this, and depending on their general approach to evaluation, they may put more or less emphasis on this in comparison to other aims of the evaluation. For example, different evaluators may place greater or less emphasis on experimental, action research and / or logic modelling approaches.

For experimental approaches, evaluators emphasise the importance of controlling the application of the independent variable; that is, the initiative under scrutiny, in this case social pedagogy. Some researchers advocate randomly allocating service users to the initiative, so that any difference in outcomes could be attributed to the initiative (e.g., Dixon et al., 2013; Greenberg & Morris, 2005). Setting up and running a randomised control trial is challenging, resource intensive, has practical challenges (Dixon et al., 2013), and may also be critiqued on theoretical grounds (Hough, 2010). Some attempts at randomised control trials in children's services have struggled to recruit sufficient participants to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention (e.g., Dixon et al., 2013; Mezey et al., 2015) and studies on social pedagogy so far have tended to have relatively low sample sizes (Cameron, 2016). Randomised control trials also require clear, quantifiable measures of outcomes and a reliable baseline (Dixon et al., 2013), the challenges of which were discussed above. Moreover, it requires keeping the experimental conditions separate from the control conditions. As highlighted by Smith and Skinner (2013), knowledge of social pedagogy may spread to comparison conditions, even if not intended, and conversely the experimental conditions may be affected when social pedagogues are required to operate in ways consistent with the organisational context, even when they go against social pedagogical practices (Berridge et al., 2011).

Because the conditions necessary for a randomised control trial are so difficult to establish, evaluators who are interested in using a broadly experimental approach are more likely to use a quasi-experimental approach – that is, one where the conditions are not randomly allocated, but nevertheless there are different conditions that may be compared (Greenberg and Morris, 2005). For instance, Berridge et al. (2011) grouped the houses within a service into four conditions, three of which involved social pedagogy to some extent, although introduced in slightly different ways, and the fourth of which did not involve social pedagogy and functioned as a control group. This approach allowed the evaluators to compare social pedagogy against a control to see what difference it made, and had the added benefit of allowing the different methods of implementing social pedagogy to be compared. However, the number of residents in each condition was relatively small (8, 28, 27 and 51),

meaning that even with an overall sample size of 114 residents, it would be difficult for the evaluators to draw strong conclusions about the impact of the pilot. Indeed, the findings were not statistically significant, meaning that the outcomes from the sites using social pedagogy were no better than the group that was not using social pedagogy. However, the evaluators highlighted a range of issues in terms of implementing social pedagogy and suggested that more time was needed, which could have allowed a comparison of outcomes from before implementation with outcomes after *successful* implementation (Maguire, 2004). This would provide stronger conclusions regarding the impact of social pedagogy as such, otherwise it is only a comparison of existing practice with an incomplete or failed attempt to implement social pedagogy.

Action research provides an alternative approach to experimental designs. When taking this approach, evaluators try to find out how an initiative is developing, gather data on processes (and outcomes where possible), and discuss this information with the relevant stakeholders (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). We used this approach in our evaluation (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2015) as did Smith and Skinner (2013). In particular, we met with the staff at key points over the course of the pilot, including: 1) at the start of the evaluation to discuss the purpose of the evaluation and how they would like it to proceed; 2) early in the pilot period to discuss the results of the baseline report; 3) once the social pedagogy training was completed to discuss their action plans for implementation; 4) midway through the pilot to discuss an interim report on their progress; and 5) at the end of the pilot to discuss a draft final report. These ‘feedback loops’ were intended to be of use to both us and the staff. For us, it ensured we had a good understanding of the services and helped to check the accuracy of our findings and conclusions. For the staff, it helped provide them with an independent perspective on their progress and pick up on issues that may affect their implementation of social pedagogy.

In its ‘pure form’, these two approaches are mutually exclusive. This is because providing feedback in the way that an action research approach involves might affect the conditions in an experimental design. The key exception to this is where the evaluators discover that the initiative is not being delivered as intended, and the feedback would help to get the practitioners back on track (Maguire, 2004). However, because the ideal conditions for an experimental study are unlikely to be met anyway, using an action research approach may help to address some of the limitations of an experimental design, particularly through helping to address implementation issues.

Logic modelling is an approach evaluators can use to help specify the mechanisms of the initiative and their links to potential outcomes (Axford et al., 2005; Brousselle and Champagne, 2011; Miller, 2011). For instance, Smith and Skinner (2013) applied a logic model approach in their evaluation, outlining the key aspects of the initiative, including: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. Specifying the different aspects of the initiative in this way may help to gain a better understanding of how the social pedagogy initiative is actually operating. Logic modelling is compatible with both experimental and action research approaches. It may benefit evaluations based on an experimental approach by bringing greater attention to the mechanisms for change, rather than having too much focus on the outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), and for action research approaches it may be useful for helping staff to reflect on their activities and how these might link to potential outcomes.

Discussion and recommendations

We have identified some key challenges for evaluating Social Pedagogy, notably defining terms, measuring the baseline, clarifying the unit of analysis, measuring outcomes, and deciding on an appropriate evaluation approach. We recommend that evaluators approach social pedagogy as praxis (Rolfe, 1993), considering three dimensions: values, knowledge and practices. Carpenter (2011) has outlined some of the ways in which social work education may be measured using surveys, vignettes and observations, and these approaches would be relevant for evaluating social pedagogy. Practitioners could be asked to respond to vignettes – as did Cameron (2004) – which can be rated by trained practitioners to establish how practitioners might respond in a given situation. Researchers, trainers and social pedagogues could work collaboratively to measure this throughout pilot initiatives to identify change over time. This could help establish how receptive an organisation may be to social pedagogy. This should be done before the initiative has begun and everyone involved should have a realistic sense of what change ought to be achieved over the period of the evaluation (Maguire, 2004). This should be combined with a structured way of analysing organisational documents to identify change at both the individual and organisational levels.

Evaluators should gather measures of service user outcomes using valid tools that are relevant for the service context. In this regard, evaluators and staff may have different views on the uses of these tools and it may help to have discussions around their different merits – particularly the difference between personal outcomes and outcomes at the level of the

service (Miller, 2011). It would help to look at validated tools (e.g., Unwin & Deb, 2014) and find a way to record outcomes that allows comparison (for individuals across time as well as across services), provides meaningful information to service users and practitioners, and is well integrated with practices (Miller, 2011).

Evaluators ought to be clear about the evaluation approach they are using when evaluating social pedagogy. They can place greater emphasis on the comparison aspect of the research, particularly where trying to have control conditions and make strong claims about causality, or greater emphasis on the action research aspects, particularly in terms of learning and feedback loops. Ideally, researchers can achieve both of these things, making use of comparison conditions as well as sharing ongoing information with staff and gathering their views. Due to the methodological challenges discussed above, the ideal conditions for experimental research are likely to be absent, which means it may always be difficult to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of social pedagogy. Using logic modelling – which involves mapping out all aspects of the intervention (inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact) – may help evaluators and practitioners to get a better sense of which activities led to certain outcomes (Axford et al., 2005; Cook and Miller, 2012).

Perhaps social pedagogy evaluations would be best not to claim to be evaluations of 'social pedagogy' as such. This may risk the conclusion that social pedagogy does or does not work. Rather the evaluations are evaluations of *these* practices, based on *these* principles, by *these* people, with *these* people, in *these* contexts. This may be frustrating for some, who might wish to have a clear steer in terms of whether social pedagogy is the way to go. However, it might also encourage people to pay greater attention to the specific practices under discussion, with consideration of the people involved (both as practitioners and service users), and the contexts that are involved, as well as the scope for change over time. This may be more accurate, given, as argued by Cameron (2016), social pedagogy should be understood as a profession rather than a set of techniques, and pilot initiatives tend to involve developing practices in the direction of social pedagogy, rather than the wholesale replacement of current practice with social pedagogy as such. Moreover, further research should be undertaken to clarify the exact nature and definition of social pedagogy, particularly in relation to the notion of 'mindset'.

There are a number of issues that we have not discussed, particularly regarding the context of introducing social pedagogy. For instance, in some evaluations (e.g., Berridge et al., 2011; Smith & Skinner, 2013) the context of austerity, job uncertainties, funding cuts or other organisational changes affected the service and pilot, distorting results. Some evaluators

also highlighted tensions between social pedagogues and other staff, particularly around professional approaches and rates of pay (Cameron et al., 2011). Sometimes there were cultural or language issues with introducing social pedagogues from different countries, and social pedagogues were often younger than other staff and had less experience of working in residential child care (Berridge et al., 2011). Any evaluation of social pedagogy needs to pay attention to the role that factors such as these will play regarding the effectiveness of any initiatives.

Finally, it may be provocative to say it, but perhaps the best way to evaluate social pedagogy is for evaluators to become like social pedagogues. For example, the evaluation is a 'common third': evaluators and staff learning about social pedagogy and its effects together. Evaluators could use their 'head, heart and hands' to draw on and analyse information regarding the effects of social pedagogy, connect with staff and service users on an emotional level to understand what their world involves, and take part in practical activities with staff and service users to engage in their 'life world' and learn about their practice and experiences. Creating greater congruence between the evaluation methods and the principles of social pedagogy may be the best way to ensure greater understanding between evaluators and practitioners and ultimately to produce fair evidence of its relevance and effectiveness.

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